

FIREARM SAFETY

A national study indicates that more than 53 percent of all households in the United States possess some type of firearm. Firearm purchases for sporting purposes and self defense are up sharply. Citizens are concerned about the increase in violent crimes and the increase in drug use.

Children and Gun Safety

There is no one correct age at which parents should talk with their children about guns. The parent should be the judge of that. A good time, however, is when the child starts acting at gunplay or starts asking questions. The parent should answer the questions. Be honest and open. Once the mystery surrounding guns is gone, potential incidents can be avoided.

Because of the popularity of firearms, children are likely to encounter guns in their lives. Many do so without parental supervision. Even if you do not own a gun, a child could come in contact with a gun at a neighbor's house or when playing with friends. Children need to know what to do when exposed to firearms. Unfortunately, they develop wrong ideas and impressions about firearms from what they view on television. Much of gun use on TV is inaccurate and untrue.

On television, firearms are handled with little safety in mind. Children often see movie stars who seem invulnerable to bullets. The viewing public never sees the tremendous damage a bullet can inflict. One shot can kill. Children need to understand the difference between pretend and real life.

Firearms come in all sizes and shapes. The words "gun", "rifle", "machine gun", "shotgun" and "pistol" create various images among children. Children are curious about firearms and will seek them out naturally. They need to understand that a little gun is just as dangerous as a big gun. They also need to understand the difference between a toy gun such as a cap gun or squirt gun, and a real gun such as a pistol or shotgun.

Children should never handle firearms unless parents say it is all right and then do so only in the presence of a responsible adult. They should never "show and tell" firearms to friends. Children should be taught that if they find a gun or ammunition, they should immediately tell an adult or call the police. If they see someone handling a gun who is drunk or under the influence of drugs, they should leave and immediately call 9-1-1. According to gun experts, if a child finds a gun in an unsupervised situation, they should:

1. STOP - DON'T TOUCH
2. LEAVE THE AREA
3. TELL AN ADULT

Children should be taught to never point any weapon, real or otherwise, at others. This includes BB guns, toy guns, water pistols, darts, toy bow and arrow sets, etc. They should not point a weapon at a person, the TV set, pets, birds or other animals. They should never let someone point a gun at them, and should leave if it happens.

Gun shots are not necessarily loud. If a child hears a "popping" sound, the sound of a firecracker, or what appears to be gunfire, they should not go outside to investigate. Do not assume everything is okay. Seek protection and notify the police. Adults who own firearms tend to hide them from their children. It becomes shrouded in secrecy. When children discover guns, they like to mimic what they see on television. They point and shoot. In some cases, a child too young to pull the trigger, turns it around, points it at his face, and squeezes the trigger with his thumbs. Many guns are not equipped with a safety lock mechanism, increasing their danger.

Most kids are interested in guns. Parents should explain firearm use to their children, much like they would with matches...to remove the mystery surrounding it. Why? Letting a child shoot a gun under adult supervision will teach him the immense power and danger of its use. A child will learn to respect firearms, not be misguided by what is seen on television. Children can be taught the basic rules of gun use, even with a pellet gun or a .22 caliber firearm, in a controlled setting.

Adults and Gun Safety

The essentials to proper firearm handling include knowing the basics of firearm safety, being able to void out distractions and being able to concentrate on sight alignment and trigger control. Gun use for self protection must be a reflex...one brought about through practice.

According to firearms experts, one should not buy a gun immediately after being victimized in a crime. Citizens need to understand that "getting even" with a criminal is not a good reason for owning a firearm. Trying to get even after a crime means that the gun owner will be angry, frustrated, scared, etc...and will be unsafe handling a firearm.

Adults who own guns need to be reminded of the basic rules of firearms and the safe storage of guns and ammunition. Guns are not intelligent; they are a piece of cold steel with the potential to inflict great bodily harm. A qualified gun handler is one who is well versed and trained in the fundamentals of firearms.

A firearm should never be left loaded and unattended. Don't store it loaded in the dresser drawer. Catastrophe awaits. This means that if one wants to keep a loaded gun at their bedside, it should be unloaded and put away in the morning in a locked cabinet or safe, or stored with a trigger or cable lock.

Adults should treat all firearms as if they are loaded all the time, even if the action is open or the clip is empty. Don't squeeze the trigger to "see" if it is loaded. This

is the most common cause of unintentional gun shot wounds. One should never point the muzzle of a firearm at someone unless they intend to kill or destroy.

Don't let the muzzle inadvertently drop or point at others.

Don't handle firearms when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This includes over-the-counter cough preparations and allergy medications.

Don't practice with a firearm if you feel ill, have a cold, or have an ear ache.

Guns and ammunition should always be stored separately. Ammunition should be stored in a metal container, such as an ammo box. It should be kept in a cool, dry area with little temperature change. The garage is not a good location because of wide temperature fluctuations